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After the National Endowment for the Arts: The Future Looks Bright

by Laurence Jarvik

Art today is the religion of the educated classes.

-- Tom Wolfe

By now the problems of the National Endowments for the Arts and Humanities ("NEA" and "NEH") have become well-known to the American public. The controversies over funding Andre Serrano's "Piss Christ," Robert Mapplethorpe, and Ron Athey at the NEA, and the recent denunciation by Lynne Cheney of the National History Standards developed by the NEH, have convinced thoughtful observers that the agencies are beyond repair. Far from being isolated incidents, the cases are best seen as symptomatic of larger structural deficiencies within the original concepts for the Endowments.

Both the NEA and NEH are scheduled to be phased out over the next two years in legislation before the U.S. House of Representatives. These plans are in keeping with House Speaker Newt Gingrich's statements shortly after the 1994 election that the Endowments should be "privatized." Congressional testimony from former NEH heads Cheney and William Bennett, recent statements from Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole, and the "Contract With the American Family" put forward by Ralph

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Reed of the Christian Coalition have all urged abandoning the present system of federal support.

This position is not simply one for Republican partisans; rather, it is rapidly becoming a consensus view among educated Americans familiar with the problems of the NEA whatever their political preferences. Sam Donaldson, David Brinkley, Cokie Roberts and George Will all agreed on February 23, 1992, on a broadcast of *This Week With David Brinkley* that the NEA did not merit federal funding. The exchange went like this:

DAVID BRINKLEY: So do we need a National Endowment at all? George?

GEORGE WILL: No.

BRINKLEY: Sam?

SAM DONALDSON: Not with government funding.

BRINKLEY: Cokie?

COKIE ROBERTS: Well, I, it is true that we give fewer government dollars to the arts than any other country, but I suppose we don't need to give any.

BRINKLEY: Well, we survived a long time without it and we may wind doing so again.

Jonathan Yardley, book critic of *The Washington Post* and a Pulitzer Prize judge, concluded: "in our pluralistic, heterogeneous society it is impossible to reach consensus on matters of taste, a reality that helps account for many of the limits on government imposed by the Constitution. Not merely cannot government preside over everything, it should not; nowhere is this more true than in the creation of literary and artistic work, which by its very nature is individualistic, and often is eccentric and controversial."¹ James Glassman, another *Washington Post* columnist (who also contributes to *The New Republic*) urged Congress to cut the NEA to show a serious commitment to deficit reduction.

In *The New Yorker*, dance critic Arlene Croce complained about the domino effect of NEA funding decisions on other arts funders: "By the late eighties, the ethos of community outreach had reached out and swallowed everything else; it was the only way the NEA could survive.

1. Jonathan Yardley, "Drawing the Line on Arts Funding," *The Washington Post*, Feb. 2, 1995, p. B2.

The private funders soon knuckled under to the community- and minority-minded lobbies — the whole dynamic of funding, which keeps the biggest government grants flowing on a matching-funds basis, made the knuckling under inevitable. But ideology had something to do with this. When even museum directors can talk about ‘using art’ to meet this or that social need, you know that disinterested art has become anathema.”

Along the same lines, *The Los Angeles Times* published a column by painter Leonard Koscianski, winner of NEA grants, called, “Cancel the NEA Stamp of Approval.” He wrote: “Just as the welfare system has had disastrous unintended consequences for the health of American families, so too the NEA is crippling a once lively national arts community with its misguided supports... The grants have become a government seal of approval, honoring the work of artists deemed ‘aesthetically correct’ by these panels. This is especially troublesome in academia, where a government seal of approval is doubly rewarding, giving grant winners an edge in the promotion and tenure process... the NEA practices censorship on such a grand scale that it escapes notice. At the NEA whole categories of usually the more conservative and traditional, are excluded from serious consideration... independence of American artists from government patronage and its concomitant meddling has been an important factor in the development of their special form of intense creativity... If history is any indication, the elimination of the NEA could mark a renaissance in contemporary American art and its influence on the soul of the nation.”

Alice Goldfarb Marquis, writing in the *New York Times*, commented that the “absurd hysteria whipped up by the Endowment’s clients obscures this thirty-year old program’s waning relevance to the evolving culture.” She calculated that government spending on the arts in the United States is more than \$13 per person when one includes local and state funding and tax incentives, a higher level than Great Britain. Marquis pointed out that despite this lavish tax subsidy “attendance at all arts (except perhaps, opera) has been relatively static since 1980 but the expenses of nonprofit arts organizations have leaped dramatically. In theater, the number of performances in 1992 was almost the same as in 1980. Yet gross expenses more than tripled. Symphony orchestras enjoyed about the same attendance and gave about the same number of concerts in 1992 as 1984, but expenses doubled.” By her calculations, more than 50 percent of all NEA grants go to “a host of organizations lobbying for the arts in Washington” and to administration.

Whether or not the NEA is able to survive its legislative battles is

no longer the issue, for the agency has already lost its legitimacy with the most important constituency: the educated opinion leaders of the American public. Originally a beneficiary of an elite consensus developed at the time of President John F. Kennedy's *Camelot*, when "the arts" meant Pablo Casals playing at the White House and Lady Bird Johnson's efforts to beautify America's highways, the NEA has, quite frankly, become a laughingstock as a result of the art it has chosen to support over the years — to the point where Dave Barry jokes, "The government supports the arts for the same reason it purchases \$400,000 fax machines and keeps dead radioactive beagles in freezers: Nobody else is willing to do it."

In her important new book entitled, **Art Lessons: Learning from the Rise and Fall of Public Arts Funding**, Alice Goldfarb Marquis details the history of the NEA's activities since 1965. It concludes that the NEA has failed in its mission to foster excellence in the arts and urges the agency be abandoned. "With the Endowment's judgment tarnished, and its funding unlikely to thrive in the future, the discussion must turn to how Americans can best underwrite the arts by other means."

Marquis proposes that the federal government pay for a "public impresario" in towns and hamlets across the nation. Marquis notes that in the private sector such impresarios "flourished into the twentieth century until after the Second World War, when university arts series and nonprofit presenting organizations drove impresarios off the cultural stage." No doubt the model for this proposal is the French Ministry of Culture, which pays for an *animateur* in French villages who books concerts and other performances into the municipal auditorium. But such a suggestion is misplaced, since a federally-financed impresario would be little different from a director of current NEA-funded "presenting organizations," such as the Walker Art Center, which last year hosted Ron Athey's ritual torture, bloodletting, and flesh carving. No doubt some enterprising "public impresario" might share the same taste, and cause the same scandal over the abuse of federal tax dollars, under Marquis' scheme. Yet Marquis is quite right that the public debate has shifted towards a discussion of what

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will come "after the NEA."

Rather than a federally funded "public impresario," it is more likely that there will be a welcome return to the American tradition of private impresarios who dominated the American scene before the NEA such as Sol Hurok and Arthur Judson. Hurok represented such singers as Marian Anderson, Jan Peerce and Roberta Peters, Victoria de Los Angeles and musicians like Artur Rubinstein, Andres Segovia, and Isaac Stern. He also packaged and toured across the nation such acts as the Bolshoi Ballet, the Sadler's Wells Ballet, and the Vienna Boys Choir, as well as London's Old Vic theatrical productions. As Hurok's biographer, Harlow Robinson, concluded in, **The Last Impresario: The Life, Times, and Legacy of Sol Hurok**, while Hurok testified to Congress in favor of the NEA in 1963, "he had to realize more fully than ever that the wonderfully crazy days when it was possible on sending a troupe of dancers, musicians, props, and equipment on a whistle-stop tour across the country were gone forever...The future belonged to a new animal: the tax-exempt nonprofit sector."

Yet after the NEA there will be once again the need for feisty and individualistic impresarios such as Hurok and Judson. Judson, in the 1930's, managed both the New York Philharmonic and Philadelphia Orchestras, Lewisohn Stadium Concerts in Manhattan, a concert management bureau that became Columbia Artists Management Inc. ("CAMI"), the largest such booking agency in America, and was the second largest stockholder in CBS and Columbia Records. He also arranged for national tours of his artists with Community Concerts, featuring pre-paid bookings for his contract artists.

Embers of this vibrant and individualistic system of private impresarios continue to burn at the three major talent agencies for classical music, known by the acronymns, "CAMI," "ICM," and "IMG." The latter began by representing athletes and expanded to classical musicians, "who have much longer careers," according to the *New York Times*. Given a chance, these multi-million dollar talent agencies will be more than able to reinvigorate classical music and high cultures, in much the way "CAA's" Mike Ovitz has played such a crucial role re-inventing the Hollywood studio system.

Not all observers of the demise of the NEA share this optimism, however. Perhaps the most dire prediction was made by Samuel Lipman shortly before his death. The late member of the National Council for the Arts, music critic for *Commentary*, and publisher of *The New Criterion*

said: "the sad fact is that if private patrons were to get together as a group and promise, say, \$200 million in contributions each year over the next ten years on the condition that the NEA would go out of business and all patronage would henceforth be private, I can promise you that the first act of the new private patronage group would be to hire the ex-staff of the NEA. The second act would be for the new private patronage group to go to all the old recipients, which it would have on a computerized list of grants from the NEA. And instantly, one would have exactly the same programs as the NEA, only there'd be people running around saying, 'Isn't it wonderful! It's private.'" Lipman felt the "real problem is to decide what has gone wrong with private patronage in this country: Private patronage is backing, not only every damn fool thing in the arts, but every damn vicious thing in the arts."

Lipman was certainly right to point out that private patronage is no *panacea* for the problems facing the arts. After all, approximately \$9 billion is spent annually on the arts in America,² and the NEA's budget is only \$167 million. Even after the NEA is gone, private individuals, foundations, and institutions will still make questionable decisions and demonstrate bad taste on occasion. However, Lipman's analysis ignores the extent to which private patronage and the independence of artists has been compromised by the existence of NEA itself. It is in fact extremely doubtful that private foundations would agree to let a third party organization influence their decisions to the extent that the NEA does. For, absent the NEA *imprimatur*, why should the Ford Foundation fund something already being funded by the Getty Foundation? Where is the philanthropic distinction? Indeed, officials of major foundations including the Rockefeller Foundation testified before Congress that they would not replace the functions of the NEA privately. Yet it can be assumed that the Ford, Rockefeller, Mellon, Pew and other wealthy foundations would continue philanthropy in support of the arts at their present level after the NEA.

Without the existing NEA-funded network, described in a 1979 General Accounting Office audit report prepared for Congressman Sid Yates (D-IL) as a "closed circle" of panelists, consultants, and staff representing the artistic establishment, private patrons would have to take fuller responsibility for their own decisions — and local arts groups would

2. Alice Goldfarb Marquis, "NEA: Hysteria, On Both Sides," *The New York Times*, Feb. 21, 1995, p. A19.

have the freedom to consider the tastes of the local communities they serve without regard to the opinions of a federal agency — in much the same way Marvin Olasky described private charities helping the poor in **The Tragedy of American Compassion**. That is, there would be a direct relationship, and mutual responsibility, between the donor and the beneficiary. What is now an impersonal relationship would necessarily become a personal one, especially as individuals of all income levels had to decide which artistic efforts merited support.

Overt influence on current philanthropy is claimed when the NEA states that its *imprimatur* and matching grant programs enable artists to secure support who would not otherwise receive funding from the private sector. Representatives of private foundations agree, and have said they rely upon the NEA to certify the artistic merit of applicants because they cannot afford the time and trouble to make independent determinations

of this sort. The head of the Nuveen brokerage house in Chicago testified before Congress that he used NEA certification as guidance for his own company's support of the arts. He said that the NEA process was a service to him and other arts donors upon which they depended.

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Artists and presenters have testified as well that the NEA "seal of approval" is crucial to their own ability to find private donors. In a column objecting to this federal certification George Will wrote, "Cultural cost calculations can be

complicated, as Bonnie Ward Simon, administrator of the Washington Chamber Symphony, recently showed when talking about the relationship of her organization to the National Endowment for the Arts: 'It probably costs us as much in administrative time to fill out all the paperwork for this grant as we actually get. What it does say to certain foundations is, 'This is the imprimatur.'... It's like the Good Housekeeping stamp of approval.'" This time and energy will be saved after the NEA is gone, and its effort which could be spent directly on building audiences by choosing programming of greater interest to the music-going public or on recording CDs for use at home and in libraries.

NEA Chairman Jane Alexander herself testified to the significance of the *imprimatur* before the Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee. "For every federal dollar we award," she stated, "we leverage an average of \$11 in other public and private moneys — in some communities it is higher — that arts organizations must raise to complete their projects and sustain their institutions. That is a record Wall Street would envy." In other words, the NEA guides private and local support for the arts by tilting the scales in favor of projects it is willing to fund and against those which are out of fashion in Washington.

So while the removal of the NEA from the funding process is clearly not a complete answer to what Lipman described as the problem of private patronage, it would be a good first step, and at least restore a level playing field so that patrons and artists might evaluate one another more fairly. At least there would be one less opportunity to foster "group think" in the artistic community. In a sense, it would be the aesthetic equivalent of breaking up the AT&T phone monopoly, increasing competition by reducing collusion and anti-competitive practices.

Such a move would have the additional benefit of helping reinvigorate art criticism in America. In his book **Culture or Trash?** James Gardner, art critic for *The National Review*, surveyed three prominent art journals for February, 1993: *Art In America*, *Artforum*, and *Flash Art*. He counted 108 reviews. Of these, four were mixed, three were negative, and all the rest were positive. Gardner commented, "the critical act seems about as interesting as whether, in his next election, Saddam Hussein will garner 99.7 percent or 99.8 percent of the Iraqi vote." Until 1964, Gardner argues, critics greeted art with "the old style of contempt, that gauntlet of bludgeons and brass knuckles that greeted earlier vanguards like impressionism and cubism." Although Gardner points the finger at commercial gallery owners who hire critics to write catalog copy, he neglects to mention the role of the NEA in the transformation of criticism into celebratory cheerleading.

From 1972 until the Reagan administration ended the program in 1982, the NEA lubricated prominent art critics directly with cash, awarding some 200 grants totaling \$650,000. According to Alice Goldfarb Marquis they included such well known figures as Lucy Lippard, Joseph Mashek, Carter C. Ratcliff and Donald Kuspit, among others. "At the core of the program there was a certain nucleus of friends and professional colleagues who were assiduous in looking after each other's interests," said *New Criterion* editor Hilton Kramer.

Even when this particularly unsavory arrangement ended after a decade, the agency continued to directly fund art journals — which paid critics, had editors who were critics, and were read by critics. The Endowment still pays for art critics to sit on panels evaluating art for the NEA — often with critics making actual grant recommendations. Art critics also work as paid consultants subsidized by the NEA. In addition, one NEA former program director for visual arts, now director for media arts, had been editor of *Art In America* for several years. In another case, critic John Leonard of *CBS Sunday Morning* sat on an NEA media panel. Another program director for dance was married to a *Washington Post* dance critic. Given this network and emulsification, is it any wonder that Gardner found 99 percent of today's art criticism is purely positive? Simply eliminating NEA would immediately reduce opportunities for this sort of critical

conflict-of-interest situation. While others cases might arise involving private dealers or foundations, they would not have the national scope or "closed circle" nature of the existing arrangement.

Thus, the first step is to break up the artistic monopoly over both criticism and productions represented by the NEA. The next step for federal policy, however, should be to actively encourage competitive practices in both non-profit and for-profit sectors. This can best be accomplished by creating incentives for de-centralized decision making.

Non-profit arts institutions should have to compete for the patronage of donors, and compete vigorously against all other charities for donations. Such lively competition would ensure that the programs of arts charities would tend to garner the widest possible support.

Arts funding decisions should be made at the level closest to the people, and individually wherever possible. Non-profit arts institutions should have to compete for the patronage of donors, and compete vigorously against all other charities for donations. Such lively competition would ensure that the programs of arts charities would tend to garner the widest possible support. Without the NEA seal of approval, endorsements from community organizations such as churches and social clubs would be more difficult to come by. By making fundraising more difficult for the arts, incentives for excellence would increase. Prominent local arts supporters would necessarily need to take a more direct interest in the activities of

their institutions or favorite artists. More attention would also be paid to the desires of the audiences for performances, as programs changed to attract people to the theater or concert hall rather than to please bureaucratic "priorities."

A good example of this phenomenon can be found today at Lincoln Center in New York. The most popular and profitable special series is the "Mostly Mozart Festival." It is mostly sold-out and actually runs in the black, through presentations of classical music expertly performed. Yet despite its superb critical reputation and loyal audiences, it did not merit support from trendy art bureaucrats in search of "cutting edge" material suitable for funding. At one point Lincoln Center announced it would cancel the series, and only a popular outcry and massive protests from the music-going public forced the institution to change its mind — a clear case of the public having better taste than the professional arts administrators!

On the other hand, among the least popular and profitable series at Lincoln Center has been the "Serious Fun!" summer festival, which has featured performance artists like Karen Finley, one of the so-called "NEA Four." The latter has been heavily subsidized by the Endowment, and the NEA subsidy has been credited with the initiative for "Serious Fun!" in testimony by Lincoln Center Chief Nathan Leventhal before the NEA Council. Nonetheless, presenting "performance art" has lost money every year for Lincoln Center, even with backing from private donors like the Philip Morris Company. Elimination of NEA funding, in this case, would have a beneficial aesthetic result for Lincoln Center's programming — by making it less likely for the institution to present artistically questionable "performance art" and "festivals" — while it would not affect popular series with community backing which bring classical music to the people of New York City. Indeed, elimination of the "Serious Fun!" festival leaves more programming money and ticket dates available for classical and classic jazz performances.

Elimination of NEA funding would have a similar beneficial effect on American museums, which would be given incentives for closer contact with the local communities they serve. For example, the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston is a marvelous tribute to the personal taste of the Boston Brahmin and art collector. Entering the mock *palazzo*, one not only gets a glimpse of wonderful art, but is simultaneously transported into the world of grace and luxury. There is, however, one gallery totally out of keeping with the anachronistic charm of the establishment.

It features contemporary art, specifically photographs, which have no connection whatsoever with Mrs. Gardner or her collection. However, this contemporary gallery has received support from the NEA and the museum administration has placed it on the ground floor, near the cafeteria. It serves as a distraction from the elegance of the museum, and of course the photography is unmemorable. It is a monument to bureaucratic vandalism by arts administrators. With the NEA gone, it is unlikely that supporters of the Gardner museum would choose to keep an inappropriate, contemporary gallery featuring temporary shows going. Thus, the museum might reduce its administrative costs and revert to its original mission. Simple elimination of the NEA would, again, aid what American painter Robert Henri called "the art spirit." Eliminating the NEA would also do a favor to community performing arts groups, including amateur theater companies, not currently funded by the Endowment. For example, in Washington, DC, the "Washington Savoyards" present two productions of Gilbert and Sullivan operettas each season. The group is not funded by the NEA, and mixes some professional singers in leading roles with enthusiastic amateurs in supporting parts. Other positions, such as house manager, are similarly filled by amateurs. The company uses a full orchestra. The productions have been of an exceptionally high caliber, have sold out the auditorium at the Duke Ellington High School, and have gotten good reviews from *The Washington Post*. No doubt with fewer subsidized productions in competition after the demise of the NEA, additional performances might be added which bring pleasure and enlightenment to those seeking an evening's entertainment.

On a slightly bigger scale, there is the case of Ford's Theater, owned by the National Park Service, but managed by a true impresaria, Frankie Hewitt. A Washington fixture since the Kennedy administration, Hewitt revived productions at the historic site of Lincoln's assassination without the aid of the NEA. Through booking popular plays, sometimes with topical relevance such as a new production of **Elmer Gantry**, Hewitt has kept her venue alive and kicking. She also produces an annual fundraising television special which is broadcast by commercial networks.

And, of course, there are always true amateur theater troupes, like the Chevy Chase Players of Washington, DC, which perform their theatricals in local community centers, attended by friends, neighbors, and family of the cast and crew. The growth in amateurism, motivated by genuine love of theater, would be another benefit to the public stemming from the NEA's elimination.

In terms of museums, elimination of the NEA would reduce the role of arts administrators and experts in grantsmanship, and increase the importance of curatorial staff and museum boards. A good example of an active private museum which might be a model for a post-NEA world can be found at the Newington-Cropsey museum near Tarrytown, New York. Here, one private patron, Mrs. Barbara Newington, has assembled the world's foremost collection of paintings by Hudson River School painter Jasper Cropsey, and built her own contemporary answer to the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston. Attached to the museum and collection is a school for artists, in much the manner of the original Barnes collection, and a cultural studies center which publishes an arts magazine, *American Arts Quarterly*. The personal involvement of Mrs. Newington, who is also Cropsey's granddaughter, insures that the sense of mission is shared by museum personnel and reflected in the classes, seminars, and publications. This truly personal element is, of course, missing from many NEA-funded alternatives.

Such is the natural tradition of American cultural institutions, reflecting the individualist nature of American society. Whether Carnegie Libraries, the Astor Library, Carnegie Hall, the Frick Museum, the Field Museum of Natural History, Peggy Guggenheim's collection, the Peabody and Essex Museum, the Terra Museum of American Art, or the Museum of Modern Art itself, "founded in John D. Rockefeller's living room, to be exact, with Goodyears, Blisses, and Crowninshields in attendance," as Tom Wolfe put it, they reflected the distinct personalities of artistic benefactors. This does not guarantee good taste, as the excellence of the Norton Simon Museum has been contrasted with the shortcomings of the Armand Hammer Museum and Cultural Center in Los Angeles or the Huntington Hartford in New York. But at least the museum visitor, or contributor, knows who is responsible, and the staff would know the personality of the institution to be maintained.

Perhaps the best example of an individual personality and mission coming to be embodied in an institution is the Getty Museum. J. Paul Getty is actually buried on the Malibu, California site which repro-

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duces a Pompeiian villa. Described in its early days by cynics as the world's best collection of second-rate works by first-rate artists, the death of the founder and subsequent bequest of \$3.6 billion changed all that. The Getty foundation which supports the museum spends about \$150 million annually — about equal to the amount actually given out by the NEA, and an answer to those who claim no private substitutes are possible, since the Getty foundation did not exist when the NEA was set up in 1965. Its new museum is scheduled to be among the largest collections of art in the world. For years the mere presence of a Getty bid at an auction increased prices. Like Newington-Cropsey, the Getty supports a study center with guest scholars, and also an arts education program for schools stressing basic skills such as drawing in what is called "discipline based arts education" rather than finger-painting.

While the verdict on Getty is certainly not yet in — among the guest scholars at their study Center was writer Krista Wolf, charged with informing for the dreaded Stasi East German secret police in the days of Communism — one can certainly say that the Getty, despite its huge size, will be a monument to an individual's personal conception of an art museum for his personal collection.

In addition to amateurs, audiences, and individual benefactors, corporate support for the arts represents an important beneficial influence. Corporations which support culture generally benefit from the "halo effect," what Herb Schmertz of Mobil called "affinity of purpose marketing" in his discussion of the oil giant's support of endeavors like *Masterpiece Theater*. That is, as Schmertz noted "cultural excellence generally suggests corporate excellence." To that end, Mobil sponsored a number of cultural enterprises in addition to PBS television shows, most notably major grants to New York museums to stay open on Tuesday nights. Such corporate sponsorship again benefits the arts because it is to the mutual benefit of both parties that quality be maintained. While Mobil has cut back on its funding recently, to this day, for example, Philip Morris is one of the leading supporters of dance in the country and actually sponsors the Nancy Hanks lecture given in honor of the late NEA Chair. As Alice Goldfarb Marquis notes, by 1988 corporations were giving \$634 million annually to the arts nationwide,³ four times the NEA share. This corporate accounting does not include expenditures by the entertainment industry on film, television, music and related popular fields

3. Alice Goldfarb Marquis, *Art Lessons*, Basic Books, New York, 1995.

totaling around \$50 billion annually. Indeed, the entertainment industry and allied fields were estimated to gross \$340 billion annually by none other than Barbra Streisand (Barbra makes some \$52 million of that herself, according to *Forbes*). The industry could replace the entire NEA budget with the cost of one Hollywood picture, such as the estimated \$175 million movie *Waterworld*, or one year's income for Steven Spielberg, estimated at \$165 million by *Forbes*.

One task currently performed by the NEA, one which could not be replaced at a purely local or personal level, is the granting of national recognition to artists. Proponents of this function argue that there is no other way to honor achievements in the arts nationally and garner the respect of the entire nation without the NEA. In addition to cash grants, the NEA is responsible for the awarding of the purely honorific National Medal of the Arts. However, one might question the true artistic prestige of this award in the first place, as it is chosen for political reasons as well as artistic ones, what Marquis calls "a carefully crafted blend of foundations, corporations and demographically correct individuals of unquestioned achievement in their fields." Indeed, the medal has been rejected by both Leonard Bernstein and Stephen Sondheim as a form of political protest against government policies. In addition, the National Medal of the Arts seems to overlap the Kennedy Center Honors, which would not be affected by the elimination of the Endowments.

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What is clear, however, is that such recognition can be given by national bodies which are not agencies of the federal government. A familiar case is that of the Oscars, awarded by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, a private organization. As *Boston Globe* columnist Jeff Jacoby has pointed out, the Pulitzer Prize offers national recognition to writers and reporters who also can receive Columbia-du Pont awards, the Grammys go to musicians — including classical ones, and Tonys go to actors, directors, and choreographers for the stage. All of these carry more prestige than the National Medal of Arts, because

they are institutions of the respective fields themselves. Other artistic specialties have their own awards, including the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the Newberry Medal. Even the Guggenheim fellowships and MacArthur "genius" awards carry a singular prestige somehow lacking in the presentations of politicized medals. Televising the awards ceremony for a poetry prize would probably do more to encourage poets than all the NEA grants given since 1965, for recognition is precisely that: being publicly recognized.

In conclusion, after the NEA the future of the arts in America looks bright. De-centralization and de-massification will breakup the monopoly network the NEA has subsidized. Groups will be more likely to form based on true elective affinities, in the manner of churches, garden clubs or softball teams.

More competition will bring artists closer to the American public. Boards of cultural institutions will take a more direct interest in what is being presented, as Uncle Sam will no longer be certifying the taste of their hired help. Private impresarios will book tours of dancers and musicians across the nations, with a notion of what will appeal to audiences rather than to a distant federal bureaucracy in Washington. Artists will paint, sculptors will sculpt, composers will compose, poets will pen verse, and authors will scribble prose. Many of them are amateurs on weekends and after work. The goal of such art will be to attract and amuse and delight members of an audience, or find fame and fortune, or satisfy inner urges of the creators. But the goal will not be to satisfy a bureaucratic directive or fulfill a quota requirement of a "multiculturalism outreach program."

Subsidized venues which have depended on federal largesse to present art and performances which might not attract sufficient independent support — will sink or swim on their own merits.

For it will be after the National Endowment for the Arts.